



LINCOLN CHAFEE

U.S. SENATOR

RHODE ISLAND

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CHAFEE SCHOOL FUNDING AMENDMENT PASSES SENATE

*Sponsors Fiscally Responsible Amendment Adding \$2 Billion for
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, **U.S. Senator Lincoln Chafee (R-RI)** successfully offered an amendment on the Senate floor to the fiscal year 2007 Budget Resolution that will increase funding for special needs students in America's public schools. The amendment provides an additional \$2 billion for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), a federal mandate requiring states to provide a "free, appropriate public education" to students with disabilities. The amendment was approved by unanimous consent and is now included in the Senate version of the budget.

IDEA was enacted in 1975, and at that time the federal government agreed to assist states with this costly mandate by paying 40% of the per pupil expenditures for students with disabilities. Unfortunately, the federal government has failed to fulfill its promise to the program, last year allocating just 17.8% of the 40% promised. This year's proposal stood to bring that percentage down further. Senator Chafee's amendment increased the federal share to 20%, half of the federal government's promised amount. This increase is offset by savings from administrative expenses elsewhere in the budget.

"As Mayor of Warwick, Rhode Island, I saw the real life consequences of federal budget decisions for our constituents. When the federal government doesn't hold up its end of the bargain on initiatives such as IDEA, the burden is borne by the local property taxpayers. Today, property taxes continue to be the most burdensome for taxpayers, and school costs provide the greatest increase to these amounts.

For example, school systems in North Providence and East Providence are struggling to find necessary funding for their schools. Stories published in the Providence Journal in February cited the reason for this lack of funding as 'special education mandates.'

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My amendment eases that undue burden on the property taxpayer significantly, and would provide at least half of the government's obligation to the states. While I would certainly like to fully fund IDEA and have always supported measures that would do that, it is important to note that in the current budget climate, that is not possible.

With our schools' improving ability to identify and treat students with disabilities, costs continue to skyrocket. It is unfair to continue to place this burden on the backs on America's property taxpayers, and this fiscally responsible amendment is a strong statement to states, localities, schools, and taxpayers that we are working to ease this burden and live up to our commitment to IDEA funding levels."

The budget will continue to be debated throughout the week. Upon passage of House and Senate versions, the respective chambers will work together in a conference committee, to iron out the differences between the two bills. The budget will then come before the House and Senate again for final passage.

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